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MIAMI HERALD
5 APRIL 1983

Committees to investigate legality of U.S. operations in Nicaragua

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WASHINGTON — Congressional oversight committees will review U.S. involvement in Central America to determine if the Reagan Administration is violating restrictions imposed on a not-so-secret operation against Nicaragua, committee members and administration officials said Monday.



Boland

The restrictions prohibit the administration from efforts aimed at the overthrow of Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government or of provoking a war between Nicaragua and Honduras, the alleged base of U.S.-backed anti-Sandinista rebels.

An amendment including the limitations was added to an appropriations bill last December by Rep. Edward Boland (D., Mass.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. It was passed unanimously.

Meanwhile, under still-classified guidelines, the administration reportedly has been authorized by congressional intelligence oversight panels to finance anti-Sandinista guerrillas to interdict alleged Nicaraguan arms shipments to leftist Salvadoran rebels.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D., N.Y.), vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and the main proponent of reviewing covert activities, said Monday there is growing concern among committee members that the administration may be violating the spirit, if not the letter, of the Boland amend-

ment.

"We'll be reviewing the administration's compliance with the law to make sure it is being followed," Moynihan said, adding that there are a "growing number of members who question if the CIA is actually complying with the law."

Aides said Moynihan, his supporters on the panel, and members of the committee's House counterpart are seeking unprecedented open sessions to force the administration to shut down or rein in the operation.

White House deputy press secretary Larry Speakes and State Department spokesman Alan Romberg denied Monday that the administration is violating the covert action limitations. However, they again refused comment on widening accusations that the United States is deeply involved in financing, training and supplying anti-Sandinista counterrevolutionaries.

Speakes and Romberg suggested the administration is prepared to answer all congressional questions as long as they are asked by the intelligence panels.

"The administration is not in violation of the law," said Romberg at the State Department's regular press briefing. "The various congressional committees which have jurisdiction and oversight responsibilities are free to look into this question and I expect that they will be doing that."

The office of a Moynihan supporter, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.), said Monday the senator considers the matter of "serious concern" because he had received personal assurances from Secretary of State George Shultz that the administration was scrupulously honoring the Boland amendment.

Leahy's aides said Shultz gave those assurances Feb. 28 in an open session of the Senate foreign operations subcommittee. According to a transcript, Leahy asked Shultz if the administration was abiding by the restrictions. Shultz replied: "Yes, sir ... with no reservations."

On the House side, Rep. Michael Barnes (D., Md.), chairman of the Western Hemisphere affairs subcommittee, has introduced legislation that, unlike the Boland amendment which authorizes some funds, would cut off all U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.